

Miracle of Opened Graves

“ And the graves were opened” (Matthew 27:52)

The miracles of Calvary all came in such rapid succession that it would be difficult to describe the chronological order. However, in our study, we take up the next miracle of Calvary, which was the opening of the graves. The disturbance of a graveyard has a distinct place and importance of its own in the Calvary miracles. In certain regards, it is the most remarkable of all of the miracles -- the climax of itself is that which comes after, -- *“many bodies of the saints coming out of the graves.”*

First, let's consider this miracle as it is given in Scripture: *“Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened.”*

So, it was by means of the earthquake that the graves were opened. And it would appear that all the Old Testament *“saints”* -- especially those who were situated at and about Calvary rose from the grave. The earthquake would be likely to be most violent at the point of its origin --- the seat of the disturbing influence. And that there was a graveyard at Calvary is certain because Joseph, of Arimathea, had his tomb near Calvary - Jesus was laid in his tomb.

Since this event was meant as a testimony to the power of Christ's death, then it is most likely that many of these graves would be in close local association with the cross. Furthermore, that they were graves close by Jerusalem seems evident from the fact that when the saints arose, they went into the *“Holy City.”* It is interesting to fix upon the locality, however, I am inclined to believe that it must have been all of the Old Testament saints -- according to Ephesians 4:8-10.

It is also infinitely clear, that the graves in those days were rocky sepulchers -- excavation in the rocks, and that their entrances were made secure by doors of stone, for the two statements, *“the rocks rent”* **and** *“the graves were opened,”* are connected.

Since the opening of the graves was the same as the rending of the rocks, why do we set it off as an event by itself?

The reason is that there was a significant distinction in the meaning of the two facts. The *“rending of the rocks”* was an evidence of ***force***; the *“opening of the graves”* an evidence of ***design***. The rending of rocks gave no prophecy of the future. The opening of the graves was as the budding of the coming glory. -- See 1 Corinthians 15:23.

Since the earthquake as an event by itself and not lost in the opening of the graves, but had a distinct meaning of its own, so neither was the opening of the graves lost in the earthquake, but had its own identity and value. The opening of the graves was the instant result of the earthquake, as the earthquake was the result of the shout of victory from the cross, and so, like the earthquake, an answer to that shout. The moment Christ died, the graves opened.

These were the graves of *“saints”* **alone** -- only *God's children, Christ's people*. It is a grand conception. Those many graves of God's children, each so lovingly and individually discriminated, were to God's eyes the monumental places of all the world.

Note, while the graves were opened at the instant of Christ's death, yet the bodies in them did not arise till *after* His own resurrection -- on the third morning afterwards. -- "*Came out of the graves after His resurrection,*" (See Matthew 27:53).

So, it is not the rising of the bodies of the saints that we are considering now -- that miracle we will study later -- but now we are taking into consideration simply the opening of the graves, a miracle in itself. The opening of the graves had a force of its own as distinct from the purpose of it. It is something that was not lost in the contemplated resurrection any more than it was lost in the earthquake.

So it was one grand preparation that needed to be made at the instant of Christ's death, at precisely the Savior's own entrance among the dead. The opening of the graves would not be delayed till Christ returned from the dead, even though the accomplishment of the purpose of the opening was so delayed.

With all that was taking place, how obvious was the miraculous. With an overpowering conviction, the opening of the graves was the clearest and mightiest of God stepped in to inserted, one of His most powerful testimonies to the victory of the death of Jesus Christ.

The fact that the graves were opened at the instant of Christ's death, but, the resurrections did not take place till the third morning afterwards shows that the opened graves were meant for an *exhibition* (Matthew 27:52-53)

If the rocky doors of the graves were opened by the earthquake, merely to permit the bodies to come forth, then the earthquake would not have taken place till the moment for their bodies coming forth. But the graves were exposed from Friday afternoon till Sunday morning, exposed before thousands of spectators. No attempt at closing these graves would have been permitted during the intervening Sabbath. So, it does seem clear that the opening of the graves was meant for an exhibition, that the purpose of it was to give a testimony to give.

Why were the graves opened? What sort of resurrection were these? Were they, as in the case of Lazarus, the body merely revived? In a later study, we will look more closely at the reason for the bodies of these saints rising at this particular time. The point in this study is that the opening of the graves implies that it was for a witness, or testimony of what was taking place. To believe that grave-doors have to be removed for the exit of *spiritual bodies* is contrary to everything God's Word teaches. A spiritual body has spiritual capabilities. Jesus, in His risen body entered the room where the apostles were assembled, independently of any opened entrance. God's Word teaches that His risen body is the model of the true resurrection bodies of His saints.

Is such a resurrection then dependent on the opened grave? No more than the departure of the human spirit from the earth is dependent on the breaking down of the walls and ceiling of the room where it takes place.

We see the demonstration of this in the coming forth of the body of Jesus Christ from the grave. A great stone was rolled to the door of His sepulcher; but when He left the sepulcher, that stone had not yet been rolled away. It was removed soon after, to show the disciples that the sepulcher was empty -- to convince them of Christ's

resurrection. An angel came down from heaven to do it. But at the moment of its being done, Christ was not there.

However, when Lazarus was raised, he was called back into his former natural body and so the command was first given, *“Take ye away the stone.”*

The opening of those graves, in this Calvary miracle, can be harmonized with the teaching of Scripture of *“three stages of the first resurrection,”* this being the first stage of the first resurrection – To understand *‘the graves opening’* at this time, it is necessary that we be familiar with 1 Corinthians 15:23-24, that teaches, *“Every man is his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming. Then cometh the end ‘ones,’ when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father.”*

The New Testament teaching concerning the first resurrection was understood with the Jewish harvest in mind. This harvest, of which the first resurrection is patterned, has three *“groups”* – the first fruit, the main harvest, and the gleanings.

These bodies, coming out of open graves, were believer’s first stage of the first resurrection, *“every man (will be raised) in his own order.”* The word *“order”* is translated from the Greek word *“tagma,”* a military word meaning, *“troop.”* This verse states, *“Every man – [every born-again believer] – will rise from the dead but in his own troop, or group...”* *“Christ, the first fruits” (troop #1); “then, when He comes, those who belong to Him” (troop #2). “Then the end will come...” (troop #3)!* Note, three troops (groups) are mentioned here in 1 Corinthians 15:21-24.

We will look more fully at this *“order of the first resurrection”* in the study of *“The Miracle of the Resurrection of the saints.”*

These bodies made part of the multitude of captives Christ captured from in place of departed spirits, which He took these captives with Him when He ascended on high (See Ephesians 4:8-10 & Hebrews 2:14-15).

Now when Christians die they no longer go into the lower parts of the earth, but go to heaven to await the resurrection of the body (See 2Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-24; Revelation 6:9-11; Hebrews 12:22). The wicked continue to go to hell to await their resurrection (Luke 16:19-31 & Revelation. 20:11-15).

The opening of the graves was a symbol of the rending asunder of all obstructions to the glorious resurrection of bodies -- *spiritual and incorruptible!* Mere grave door of rock were opened, revealing that they were flimsy barriers, as compared with the difficulties of the coming harvest resurrection of the dead. The *“first fruit”* of the harvest was a guarantee of the main harvest that was to come – this, first stage of the resurrection of the saints, is a assurance and warranty of the great harvest *“when He [Christ] comes for those who belong to Him.”*

The opening graves revealed the saints in the underworld, held prisoners till their sins were paid from was now lead into heaven by Jesus Christ. Their eternal souls united with their *“spirit body,”* in incorruptibility and glory, forever to be with Christ in heavenly Paradise. [See lesson on: *“Jesus, after death, but before His resurrection”*]

Carrying God’s divine plan of the victory wrought in the heart of the earth itself, where God’s dead before Christ’s death and resurrection were comforted in Paradise. In a place Jesus described in Luke 16 as *“Hades”* – or *“the place of departed spirits.”* Since

Christ's resurrection and ascension spirits of righteous dead ascend to Him "far above all heaven." Jesus first descended into "hades" (Acts 2:27 & 31) -- the "Paradise" side of this place of departed spirits (Luke 23:43), then He led with Him these "captives" when He ascended up into heaven (Ephesians 4:8-10).

How symbolically beautiful, then, that it was by the earthquake the graves were opened! The victory of the Savior's death had passed through, to the departed saints in the "heart of the earth," and had torn open the gates of their enclosure! The victory at the center was felt at the surface, and the trembling earth and rending rocks gave token of the joyous revolution affected for captives held there in Paradise.

The opening of the gates of Paradise in this place of departed spirits that was done in the spirit world is symbolized by the opening of the graves. Every obstruction to the promised resurrection of our body, and to the full resurrection glory of the body, was rent asunder, and we only wait for the appointed time of our manifestation.

These graves were opened precisely at the instant of Christ's death. That instant is made all the more emphatic because the dead bodies did not come forth till the third morning after Christ Himself arose. The graves were opened at Christ's death, but the actual coming to life was not to take place until Christ's resurrection - specifically connecting the death of Christ with the opening of the graves.

Christ's death opened the graves, showing that His death destroyed the power of death. The power of death is sin (Romans 12:5). Death entered into the world by sin, and is the penalty of sin. Therefore, the dying of Jesus Christ, who had no sin of His own, was His bearing for mankind the penalty of sin.

Interestingly, the word "death" and the word "separation" are one and the same in the Hebrew, therefore, "eternal death" is "eternal separation" of man from the life of God. Jesus, in dying and bearing man's penalty of sin, died not alone as to His body, but also and more fearfully, in the awful inflictions upon His soul. He was made a curse for us, that we might be redeemed from the curse (See Galatians 3:13 & Isaiah 53:10-12).

Jesus Christ exhausted the penalty of sin in our behalf, and made it possible to take away from us all the condemnation of sin. So, the symbolical fact of the opening of the graves was at the instant of His death. The death-power of sin was broken by Christ's death, and all obstructions to our attaining to the true life both of soul and body were entirely removed.

"Atonement" is satisfaction to the justice of God by means of the sufferings and death of our gracious Substitute. Some has said, "Atonement is At one with God." It is Jesus Christ taking our place and paying the penalty for our sin - when He died on the cross.

What was signified by the opening of the graves was what Jesus Christ accomplished; taking away all obstacles to our attaining true life! He took upon Himself God's curse upon us. He exhausted the curse and made it possible to take away from us the condemnation of sin. Because He took our sin, the power of sin had to be broken, If He had not broken its power, and the curse would still have been upon Him. He would still be held by death. However, because He was the divine Son of God, He could pay

the penalty for sin – which is death – but rise again, to provide for us, no only the forgiveness of sin, but also eternal life!

God's symbolism could be no other way. First, Christ died and the opening of the graves took place at the moment man's sin was paid for. Second, those bodies of the saints could not have received life until the victory in our behalf had been pronounced. That victory was pronounced by the resurrection of Christ. His death opened the prison doors, and left the way free for those held in Paradise. His resurrection was the triumph of that freedom. His death secured for every saint their resurrection blessedness, in that it abolished all hindrances to life. His resurrection was the bestowal of that blessedness upon His saints. His death is our judicial deliverance. His death is our sin pardoned; His resurrection the receipted certificate of the pardon. His death was the Paradise side of Hades opened; His resurrection, Paradise made empty. His death is the grave torn asunder; His resurrection is the dead bodies of His saints walking forth from their graves in the life incorruptible and eternal!

Of such redeeming power was the death of Jesus Christ -- that "*the graves were opened!*" Accordingly there are no longer any obstacles of everyone being personally delivered even now from essential death. "*He that believeth on Him that sent Me,*" Jesus said, "*is passed from death unto life; and He shall never die.*"

Whoever trusts in Christ is *now* made free, in his conscience, from the condemnation of sin, and lives as a child of God, having passed from death unto life.

Meanwhile, his corruptible body awaits its appointed time, for now all obstructions are removed from the path of life -- from the portals of the grave up into the presence of God, where there is fullness of joy and pleasure for evermore.

The instant of Christ's death the graves were opened. Remember that! At the instant of His death all our sins were completely answered for. The graves were not merely partly opened; the obstacles not merely partly done away. There is nothing left for us to achieve in the matter of our pardon and acceptance with God. We can add nothing to the work of Christ. Our salvation from sin is in Him at his moment, and it is perfect. What you and I must do is to receive Him, and enjoy Him. Remember, "*he that believeth not shall be damned.*"

*Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come!*